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CITIES ARE CHANGING.

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THE EFFECT OF PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGES IN LARGE CITIES ARE DISCUSSED. POPULATION GROWTH IN THE LAST FEW YEARS HAS OCCURRED PRIMARILY IN THE SUBURBS. URBAN RENEWAL HAS REALIGNED AND RELOCATED THE RACES AND THE SOCIAL CLASSES, AND FREEWAY CONSTRUCTION HAS CREATED INTERURBAN STRIPS. CASUALTIES OF THESE CHANGES ARE CROWDING THE MIDDLE NEIGHBORHOODS OF THE CITY, WHERE NEW SLUMS ARE DEVELOPING. AS A RESULT, THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE EXPERIENCING PROBLEMS OF FINANCING, DISTRICTING, AND CULTURE CLASH. BECAUSE SCHOOLS CAN NO LONGER RELY ON REVENUES FROM A SHRINKING PROPERTY TAX BASE, INCREASED FEDERAL ASSISTANCE AND/OR STATE INCOME TAXES WILL BE NECESSARY. INTERDISTRICT COMPETITION SHOULD BE ERADICATED, AND MORE THAN COMPENSATORY EDUCATION IS NEEDED TO MINIMIZE THE CULTURE CLASH. (ALTHOUGH THE ARTICLE APPLIES TO LARGE U.S. CITIES IN GENERAL, EXAMPLES ARE DRAWN FROM CONDITIONS IN DETROIT.) THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN "EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP," VOLUME 25, NUMBER 1, OCTOBER 1967. (AF)

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The schools alone cannot refashion both people and their environment and instill needed confidence and hope. This is a challenge to the whole urban community.

CITIES ARE CHANGING

MEL RAVITZ
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AN ELEMENTARY, but essential, postulate for survival in both the natural and social worlds is the need for the organism or the system to adapt to its ever changing environment. History is filled with examples of species, societies and systems that failed to observe this immutable law and became its victims.

In recent years the physical and social environments of the American city have changed profoundly. No longer is the city just the city; it is rather the metropolitan region, or metroplex, vast in expanse, high in population, nucleated administratively. These changes affect the functioning of the city's institutions, including its school system.

To understand the problems confronting the public schools now and in the years ahead, it is imperative to appreciate the changing urban environment.

Perhaps the foremost urban change is population growth. Although the population of the central city itself has stabilized, the population of the urban region has increased sharply since the end of World War II. Growth has occurred primarily in the suburbs, and that is where it will continue in the years ahead. For example, the slightly more than four million people of the Detroit region will become five million by 1975, and will burgeon to seven million by the year 2000.

Related to this regional increase and redistribution of population is the fact that the space between metropolitan areas is becoming increasingly urbanized. What has for some time been evident along the north Atlantic seaboard is occurring now with great frequency in many parts of the American hinterland. Extensive interurban strips are developing as one metropolitan area merges with another, especially along major transportation routes.

Another physical fact of the changing urban region is the construction of multi-fingered freeways carving the community into multiple islands, each

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separated from others by broad bands of concrete. This consequence of freeway construction on the cohesion of the urban region has yet to be measured, but there is no doubt that it further subdivides an already anonymous, rootless population.

Casualties of Urban Renewal

Still another relevant change in urban centers is that wrought by the instrument of urban renewal. Dating back to the Housing Act of 1949, with appropriate modifications over the years, Congress has provided the money to clear large blighted tracts of the inner city. In this process of urban renewal, with its attendant displacement, relocation and replacement of population, an ecological revolution has been taking place. An interesting, new realignment of peoples by racial and social class types is resulting both from the pressures of displacement and relocation and from the many careful efforts to maintain lines of segregation.

The traditional, old inner-core slum area is being remade. In Detroit, for example, in addition to the new, middle and upper middle income luxury housing being built in the city's core area, a large medical corridor is under development, the city's major university, Wayne State, is carrying forward a significant University City expansion, and Detroit's cultural center is being revitalized and enlarged. Likewise, several light industrial parks have been built and more are planned.

The people who traditionally have lived in the core of the central city are being displaced. Only a very few low income housing units, either public or private, are proposed for this inner-core area, and these only belatedly in response to an urgent need for rehousing facilities. To be sure, two of Detroit's largest public housing projects are located in the inner core, but these were placed there originally in order to contain Negroes. In recent years, these two housing projects have had an influx of both senior citizens and married university students.

By and large, the inner city population is still mixed. It contains both large numbers of Negro and white poor who continue to live in the city's remaining blighted structures, as well as a growing number of new residents, of both races, but mostly white, who have moved into the new glass and steel renewal units. The heavily Negro inner city is changing as the new residents move in. In the next few years, if urban renewal and expressway construction continue, and if the new housing built there is mainly for the middle class, the racial and social class population shifts will appear even more pronounced.

The people displaced from the city's inner-core area are moving to the only other place they can go. Cut off from the suburbs as many are by the invisible, but nevertheless very real, segregation line, these casualties of urban renewal and freeway construction are crowding into the middle neighborhoods of the city to find the only housing available to them. There new slums are festering as a result of overcrowding, inadequate code enforcement, lack of recreation sites, and the exploitation of property by some slumlords together with the unfortunate housekeeping habits of some tenants.

Once the center of the white middle class and then, more recently, of the

Negro middle class, the middle neighborhoods of the city are the places middle class Negroes now seek to maintain or to vacate. Pressure is on this Negro middle class from the culturally different people who have now followed them out of the slums. Eventually, middle class Negroes will move into the fringes of the city and even out into the suburbs. As this movement occurs, different cities will experience different problems, depending on their respective readiness for open occupancy living. Some Negro middle class families will prefer to move directly to the new middle income renewal sites back in the city's core.

Problems of the Schools

Within the context of these physical and social changes of the city, the educational system must continue to function as relevantly and as effectively as possible. Several acute problems bear close scrutiny. They will have to be reckoned with and resolved if the public schools are to play any important part at all in the education of our children.

Finance

One problem that flows from the city's changes is that of revenue to finance the schools. Up to now, the public schools have depended on a share of the community property tax, plus additional special millage levies. To date, the schools have managed on these revenues, although in recent years the strain has been severe.

No longer can the schools rely on the limited revenues accruing from the shrinking property tax base. As more and more affluent people have withdrawn to the suburbs, and as the central city has deteriorated physically over the years, the property tax yield has, likewise, declined. Moreover, with a large poor and elderly population in the central city, it is unreasonable to raise the property tax rate to compensate for the reduced total.

Hope for the fiscal future of the public schools lies either in much increased federal assistance that can be used at local discretion, or in a much larger share of state revenues. Realistically, more state money can be provided for education only if there is a gross increase in state revenues, and the only feasible route to such a gross increase seems to be a state income tax. Michigan has just enacted such a state income tax, and, hopefully, there can now be a significant share of the additional state revenue devoted to public education. If not, the schools will suffer, particularly in the large cities.

Districting

Another problem that emerges from our urban conditions is the multiplicity of new school districts in our now enlarged metropolitan region. Each of these new districts has its own superintendent, its own school board, its own corps of teachers, its own academic standards, its own labor relations difficulties, its own revenue and space problems. It does not make either academic or administrative sense to continue this splintered district competition much longer. Some kind of coordinating device is necessary to permit common approaches to common educational problems. It may be that a regional council of governments is the proper coordinating instrument to bring a degree of order to our urban regions. In southeast-

ern Michigan we have just moved to activate such a council of governments, composed not only of representatives of school districts, but also of cities, villages, townships and counties. With each governmental unit paying its prorata share of dues to the Council, by fall it is expected that this new regional organization will be formally under way with permanent officers. It is further hoped that this Council will coordinate planning and programming in any and all areas of common concern. Surely, some such coordinating vehicle on a regional metropolitan basis is required to bring together the growing number of school districts, and to achieve some semblance of order in regard to salaries, recruitment of teachers, curriculum development, even financing and mutual assistance.

Clash of Cultures

A third public school problem resulting from the changing conditions of urban life is that of culture clash in those neighborhoods of the central city where academically better prepared and motivated children mingle with poorly prepared children with little educational incentive. This culture conflict transcends race. It focuses on those schools in changing areas where it is necessary to try to teach in the same classroom children of sharply different backgrounds and prospective futures.

While the basic concept of compensatory education is still sound, more than remedial reading teachers, extra clerks, teacher aides, more even than perceptive administrators and compassionate expert counselors are needed. In addition to all these elements of ordi-

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nary compensatory education, we must have smaller groups of children to work with, a more careful screening of those children who are emotionally too disturbed to fit in the normal classroom, a fairer racial and social class balance of students in each school, more staff who choose their own assignment in disadvantaged areas or in changing neighborhoods.

The Total Community

In these areas of the central city, and in many neighborhoods of the suburbs, we shall require, too, a fundamental approach to the parents of these children and to the neighborhood itself. We shall have to concern ourselves with decent housing for many of these children, with adequate recreational facilities, with a complete end to racial segregation and all forms of discrimination, with actual jobs at fair wages for those persons who qualify.

We shall have to understand that the public school cannot do the whole job of restoring a suppressed population segment to the mainstream of American society, at least not in a few years. Although the public schools can do much, and, indeed, are the backbone of any approach to the problems of the urban community, the schools alone cannot refashion both people and their environment and instill needed confidence and hope. This is a challenge to the whole urban community of which the public schools are but a part.

Perhaps one approach to resolving the acute problems of public education is to be found in inviting the participation of both students and their parents in the actual preparation of the school curriculum. This is now being tried as part of a study undertaken by the Wayne County Intermediate School District. Students and parents in two sets of schools in Detroit and western Wayne County will develop a total school curriculum; together they will then implement it, and observe and record the results. Hopefully, these results will point the way to curriculum development that is relevant to the needs and interests of today's youth.

Many other problems flow from the urban changes we have noted; and there are other problems that arise from other factors we have not indicated.

"Problems" is the name of the public school game. Some people question whether the schools can withstand the immense pressures of continued urban and industrial change. Surely, unless the public schools both understand the nature of the emerging metroplex, and learn to adapt so as to function meaningfully within it, they, like countless institutions of the past, will be deemed irrelevant and bypassed. Other means then will have to be found to prepare today's children for tomorrow's world.

One can only wonder whether any alternative educational means will be as democratically based and as generally effective as the public schools have been. If the schools adapt to the changing city and prepare our children to live well within it, we will not need to wonder about this.